PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
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DECCAN BIRDERS ANNUAL DINNER: Sunday, August 10, 2025, 7.00PM-10:00PM: The Plaza, Begumpet, Hyderabad. Coordinator(s): Gokul Krishna (Mobile: 99453-46585); Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 94409-10967)

Details have been shared on the email and WhatsApp groups.

FIELD TRIP: To be finalized

Details will be shared on the email and WhatsApp groups.

GASTRONOMY, REMINISCENCES AND THE BLOOMER AWARD
Report: Deccan Birders Annual Dinner 2025 & Felicitation of Aasheesh Pittie

Text: JVD Moorty; Photos: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao

The annual dinner of Deccan Birders – held, well, annually – was a special event this year.

With the monsoon in an upbeat mood, it was an event that had the organisers a bit more sentient of the ill-weather prognostications and the cascading effect on the inflow of invitees.

Weather notwithstanding, though, it was indeed a pleasure and delight to meet up with some cheerful faces and older bodies – or is it buddies? – of yore.

With each attendee being welcomed by huge smiles, handshakes, and occasional warm hugs by Aasheesh – he knew them all – and then among each other, interspersed with Krishna flitting wristily tagging each person, the not-so-clement weather was soon forgotten. Coffee, tea and biscuits were the accompanying morsels feeding ceaseless conversation.

Sagarika, the emcee for the event, brought things to order, and everyone was put in their places. On the dais, under the eyes of the audience, were seated Mr A Sankaran, DCF (Retd) and currently OSD (Wildlife), Telangana Forest Department, the Guest of Honour Dr Gopi Sundar, Dr BC Chowdhury, our past President Aasheesh Pittie, our current President JVD Moorty, and our past Secretary Shafaat Ulla.

The distinguished guests on the dais

The proceedings got under way.

JVD Moorty opening the proceedings

The President, normally very loquacious, prioritised brevity, and after a few quick introductory remarks, went to the first highlight of the evening – felicitating Aasheesh Pittie for being awarded the HH Bloomer medal – a first for a person from Asia!

For the uninitiated, this award was instituted by the Linnean Society, London, United Kingdom in 1963 from a legacy by the late Harry Howard Bloomer FLS, and is awarded to an amateur naturalist for an important contribution to the knowledge of natural history.

The Linnean Society citation goes as follows:

"To the larger natural history community in India (and beyond), Mr Aasheesh Pittie is probably best known for his work as a bibliographer of South Asian birds and as founder-editor of the ornithology journal Indian Birds*. Over a lifetime of amateur birding, he has been instrumental to the growth of birdwatching and ornithological studies in the erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh, India, as a key driver of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (now Deccan Birders) from the early 1980s until today. He has published five books and over 280 notes, reviews, journal articles, popular pieces in the mass media, including descriptions of behaviour, range extensions, observations of bird-plant interactions (a particular passion of his), and conservation. In 2015, he converted his huge bibliographic database (c. 38,000 references from 1713 to date) into a freely accessible online resource (Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology). Mr Aasheesh Pittie's contributions to Indian ornithology cannot be understated."*

I quote Aasheesh's words from their home page:

"I am deeply humbled on being selected for the H H Bloomer Award for 2025, and overjoyed at this recognition of the contribution of amateur ornithologists to South Asian ornithology. I accept this honour with gratitude. I thank The Linnean Society of London for nominating me."

The HH Bloomer Medal

Dr BC Chowdhury – who also completed a mind-boggling fifty eventful years in the field of conservation! – along with JVD Moorty, placed a shawl around Aasheesh, and Shafaat Ulla presented a memento on behalf of the society to Aasheesh.

Dr BC Choudhury and JVD Moorty honouring Aasheesh with the shawl

Aasheesh displaying the memento

Then followed some delightful, humorous and anecdotal reminiscences by the old guard. Dr BC Chowdhury, who was then working at the Hyderabad Zoo, recalled that Aasheesh showed up on his first-ever birdwatching field trip in a bright red T-shirt!

Rajeev Mathew had a few amusing stories to narrate, among them the never-to-be forgotten experience of sighting the nocturnal and extremely rare Jerdon's Courser, which incidentally has not been sighted again since then.

Suhel Quader spoke about the single-mindedness of Aasheesh in pursuing his passion and the dedication and zeal with which he worked on his books, especially the 876-page tome 'Birds in Books.' He exhorted the younger minds in the audience to follow this example.

Rajasekhar Tummala recalled how Aasheesh inspired him to become a philatelist.

Dr Vikramjit and Dr Madhusudan spoke about their birding passion being fired up after becoming members of Deccan Birders with Aasheesh at the helm.

Aasheesh addressing the gathering

Aasheesh was gracious in his thanks and spoke of the guidance he received from Dr BC Chowdhury, Suhel Quader's encouragement and help in going digital, and the support received from the members of the birding fraternity, and his own family in particular in his journey to where he has reached.

Dr Gopi Sundar speaking on the Sarus Crane

Dr Gopi Sundar then took over for his presentation titled 'The natural history of the Sarus Crane: insights into the life of the world's tallest flying bird.' His talk was peppered with witty comments – the crane *pun*dit – and the research that he has been carrying out on the social and marital life of Sarus Cranes was both a visual and an acoustic treat – he is indeed a *Craneac*, whispered to me as an aside! The talk was followed by an interactive Q&A session, with the questions posed by the audience handled deftly by Dr Gopi.

With Cronos moving on rather quicker than usual, this part of the evening was brought to its inevitable conclusion. I would like to suggest that those who missed speaking at the event about their birding experiences and interactions with Aasheesh and the Deccan Birders may please share the same on the email and WhatsApp groups of Deccan Birders.

Srikanth Bhamidipati then proposed a Vote of Thanks to bring the formal event to an end, before the inescapable group photo of all the attendees huddled together – like Ashy Woodswallows on a wire! – on the stage which very bravely held its own.

The gastronomic fare that followed was enjoyed by everyone, and a word of thanks to the kitchen staff for having rustled up a delightsome meal.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow" spake Shakespeare, and indeed it was – with more photographs as well as the now ubiquitous selfies being clicked, and there ended the evening as it began – with hugs, handshakes and even bigger smiles.

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Dollarbird (*Eurystomus orientalis*)

Dollarbird (Thattekad, Kerala, September 30, 2017)

Order:	Coraciiformes
Family:	Coraciidae
Genus:	*Eurystomus*
Species:	*E. orientalis*
Size:	28 cm
IUCN Status:	Least Concern

Description & distribution: The Dollarbird is a member of the Roller family which gets its name from the distinctive pale blue or white coin-shaped marks on its wings. It is also known by various other common names like Eastern or Oriental Broad-billed Roller, Dark Roller and Dollar Roller. An overall dark-blue bird, the upperparts show a heavy bluish-green or deep turquoise wash that can make the bird appear almost black from a distance. Underparts and undertail coverts are a lighter blue. Head is flat and dark brown to dark grey, throat shows a bright glossy blue, bill is short and bright red or deep red, and irises are black. Underwing coverts show a pale blue or white 'coin' or 'dollar' that gives the bird its name. Immature birds are much duller than the adults, lack the bright blue throat patch, and have brown bills and feet.

The Dollarbird is distributed across a wide range. Ten sub-species are recognized: *E. o. cyanocollis*, found from the Himalayas through China to south-eastern Siberia, Korea and Japan; *E. o. orientalis*, found from the southern Himalayas to Indochina, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, Borneo and the Philippines; *E. o. laetior*, found in south-western India; *E. o. gigas*, found on southern Andaman Islands; *E. o. irisi*, found in Sri Lanka; *E. o. oberholseri*, found on Simeulue, off north-western Sumatra; *E. o. pacificus* (also known as Australian Roller), found on the Lesser Sunda Islands, northern and eastern Australia; *E. o. waigiouensis*, found on New Guinea, western Papuan islands, D'Entrecasteaux Islands and the Louisiade Archipelago; *E. o. crassirostris*, found in the Bismarck Archipelago; and *E. o. solomonensis*, found in the Solomon Islands.

Habitat & behaviour: The Dollarbird is seen mostly in singles or occasionally in pairs in its preferred habitat, which is open wooded forests with hollow-bearing trees, or heavy secondary evergreen forests and nearby clearings. It is usually seen perched on power lines or on top of tall dead trees, from where it makes aerial sallies for insects, typically returning to the same perch. Its diet consists of mainly insects like beetles, grasshoppers and other flying insects, but it may also take small invertebrates at times. It is usually quiet, but sometimes utters a raucous *check check*. Flight is usually sedate with deep, powerful wingbeats.

Nesting: In the northern hemisphere, the Dollarbird breeds mainly between March and May. Its nest is an unlined natural hollow, or an old barbet or woodpecker nest, in a large tree in a forest clearing, and is often used in subsequent years also. The usual clutch consists of 3-4 white spherical eggs. Incubation duties are performed by both parents.

Local name: The Dollarbird is known as *'Pulupporukki'* in Tamil, *'Kattu panamkakka'* in Malayalam, and *'Kes kavuda'* in Sinhala.

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For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*